

**DELLS OF THE
WISCONSIN RIVER**

row, rock-bound walls repeat or vary many of the forms of the river bank; and by four small rock islands.

The beauty of the Dells depends, in part, upon the ever-varying forms of the river's walls of rock; in places dark and dripping and covered with gray and green lichens and moss, in other parts bleached and almost dazzling in the sun. Life and mystery are added to the picture by the aspect of the stream of dark brown water, swerving smartly from abrupt turns of cliff and eddying slowly below. Last, but perhaps not least to be admired of the beauties of the Dells, is the deep belt of wild vegetation which borders the gorge for its entire course except at the town.

A large part of the forest consists of oaks, but the dominating trees are the evergreens, red (incorrectly called Norway) and white pines, hem-

lock, red cedar, arbor vitae, and the like. Upon the edges and on the face of the broken cliff these grow and thrive, braced by great roots which run along the rock crevices. Especially in the Narrows and along the tributary canyons and glens, the hemlock is to be seen, drooping its lace-like green above the rocks. One of the most pleasing contrasts in all nature is seen here in the growth of occasional white birches among the more sombre evergreens. Many shrubs and small plants, which are nameless to all save the botonists, help inconspicuously to clothe the river banks. No one, however, can help noticing and admiring the ferns of the Dells. Nearly thirty species of these graceful plants grow in or near the Dells. A few are very rare, others grow in great clumps or extensive beds on the dry and sunny highlands or in the well shaded ravines.

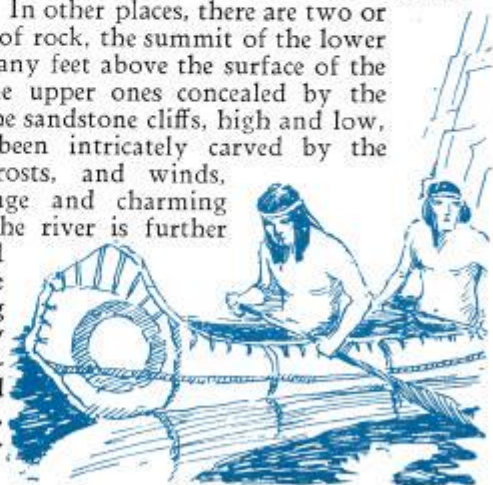


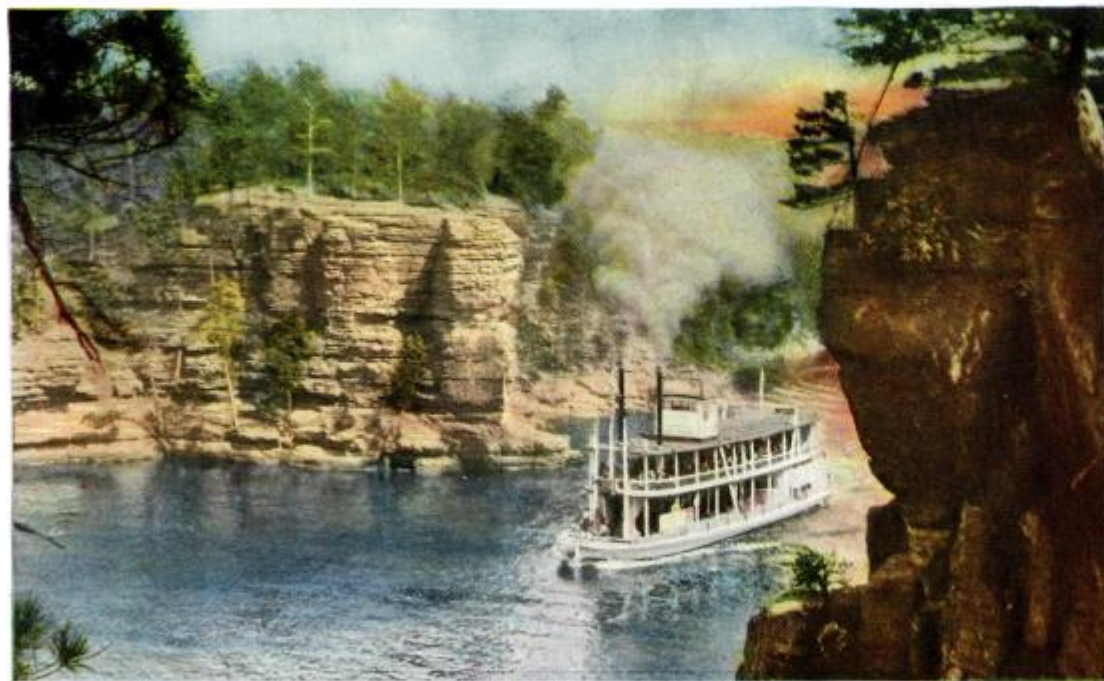
Dells of the Wisconsin River

THE Dells (or Dalles) of the Wisconsin River have for years been known and visited by tourists, who have revelled in their wild beauty and found rest and recreation here. To these old friends, this booklet is offered as a reminder of past pleasures. For those who have not seen this region and experienced its wild magic, this book attempts to present, with words and pictures, most of the noted points and a little of the history of this wonderland of Wisconsin.

The region is a little south and west of the center of the state. Here the Wisconsin River has carved a deep and narrow bed in the Potsdam sandstone of this part of the country for seven and one-fifth miles near the town of Wisconsin Dells (formerly Kilbourn) where the C., M. & St. P. & Pacific railroad crosses the stream. The town is also at the intersection of state trunk highways 12, 13, and 23, and Federal Highway 16, and is thus easy of access by automobile. A dam, just below the town, forms the boundary between the Upper and the Lower Dells. The river at the head of the Dells is broad and shallow.

As it enters the pass between the cliffs, it narrows and deepens until, half way down, it is confined for a mile to a channel less than a hundred feet wide. In one place it is but fifty-two feet across. Some of the cliffs are high and steep, offering foothold to nothing but hardy shrubs and twisted pine trees. In other places, there are two or three tiers of rock, the summit of the lower tier not many feet above the surface of the stream, the upper ones concealed by the forest. The sandstone cliffs, high and low, have all been intricately carved by the stream, frosts, and winds, into strange and charming forms. The river is further diversified by the joining of many small ravines and gorges, whose nar-





High Rock
From
Romance
Cliff



THE UPPER DELLS

The Dells are to be seen satisfactorily only by taking the boat trips up and down the river from town. After the boat leaves the landing for the Upper Dells trip, the first



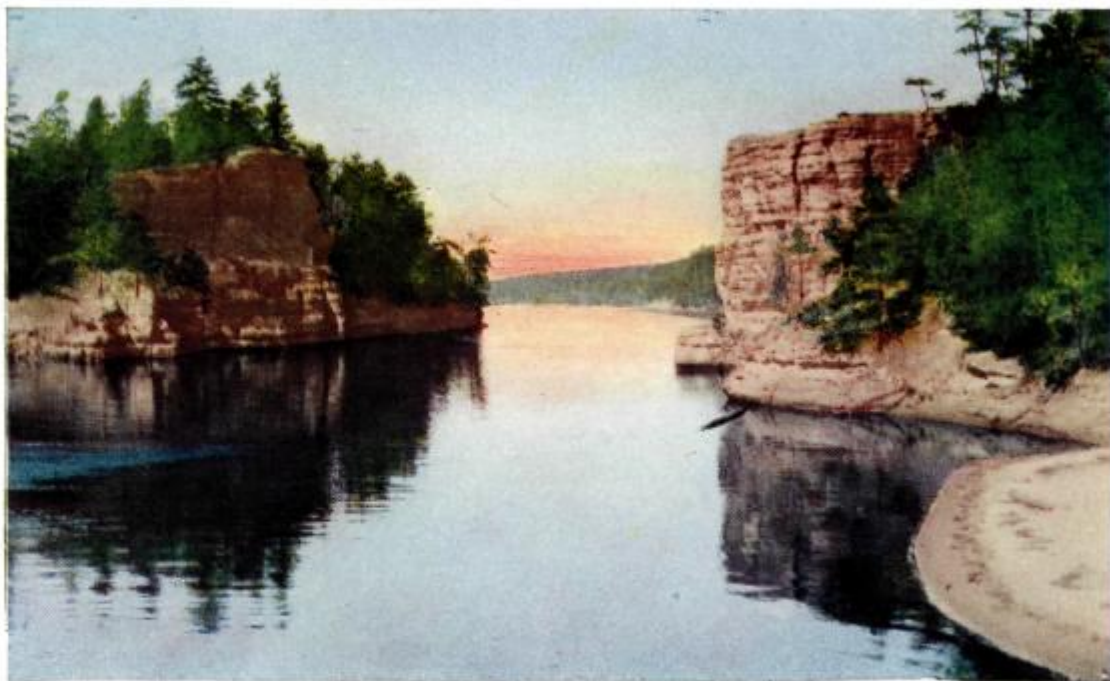
Where the
Swallows
Live



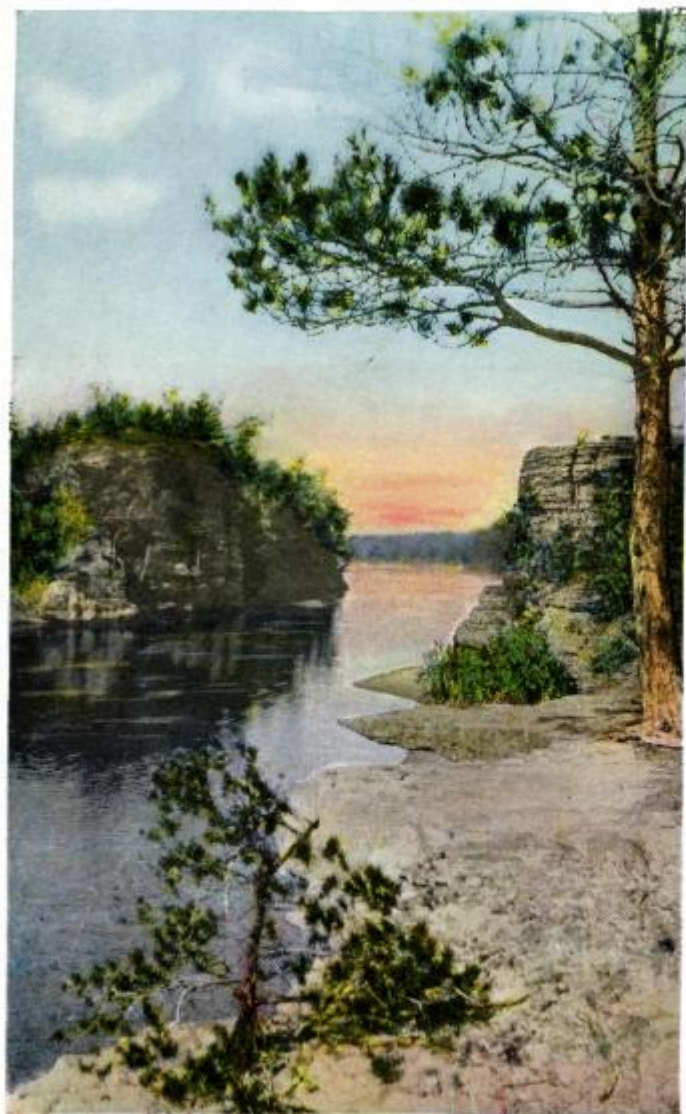
point of interest is: The Swallows' Nests on the right hand shore. Here the bank swallows have made their homes in holes in the soft rock.

The high cliffs not far beyond on either side of the stream form the Lower Jaws of the Dells. The point at the right, sunbleached, seamed, and scarred, is known as High

The
Lower Jaws
of the Dells



Rock. On the left, the gloomy pile, surmounted by a huge wedge, is Romance Cliff. Next on the right, is Chimney Rock, shaped like a stick and mortar chimney of pioneer days. Just beyond, on the face of a broken cliff, is the rugged profile known as Black



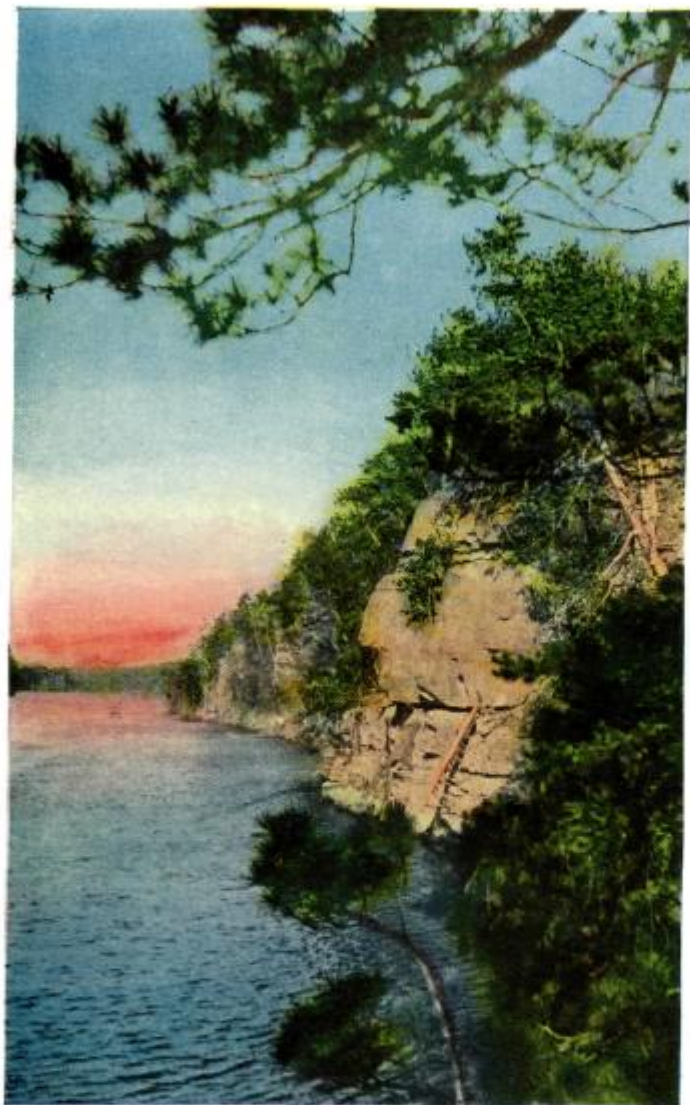
The Jaws
from the
Swallows'
Nests



Hawk's Head.

The river now makes a wide sweep before turning into the Narrows. Here, on the low wooded shore at the left, the ruins of the Old Dell House may be seen. This was a tavern of pioneer days.

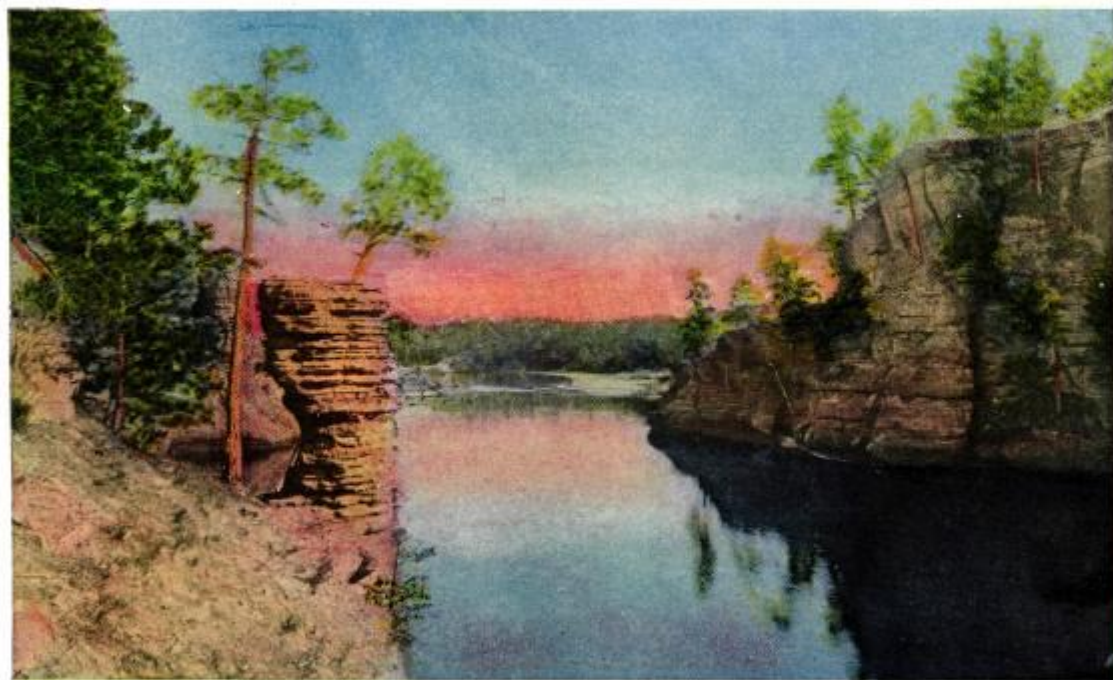
Turning first right and then left, the stream next flows



Black
Hawk's
Head



in a very narrow channel for about half a mile. The banks of the Narrows show many strange rock forms, a number of which are named. First are the Twin Sisters, two similar promontories on the left hand shore. Opposite is Chapel Gorge, a short ravine, named for the pulpit-shaped rock at the entrance.



Chimney Rock
and
Romance Cliff

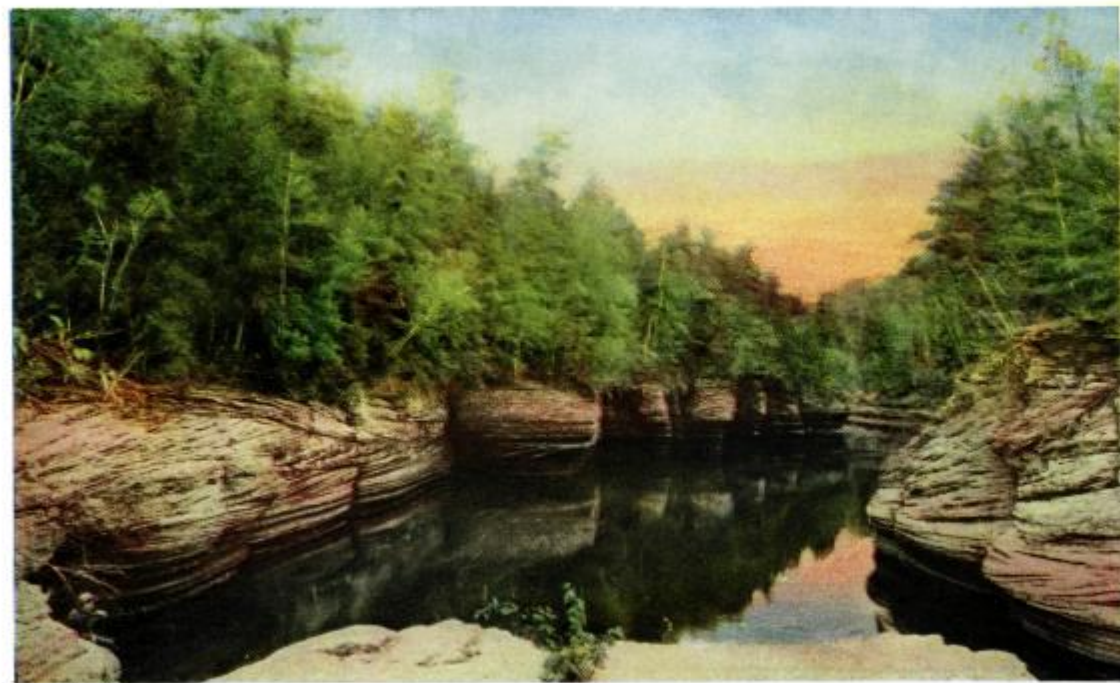


Eaton Grotto, on the left, is a deep and narrow cleft in the rock. It was named for President Eaton of Beloit College. Next above is the bold projection of Sturgeon Rock. It owes its name either to a resemblance to the head of the shovel nosed sturgeon, or to being, in early days, a good place from which to catch these fish. The Navy Yard is

The Foot of the Narrows



opposite. Here the rocks at the edge of the water have taken the forms of prows of ships, lying at anchor. Just beyond is Gates' Ravine. This was named for the pioneer owner of this part of the river bank. The Devil's Elbow is an almost right-angled turn of the river. It was named by the raftsmen to whose work it added a great deal of difficulty and danger.



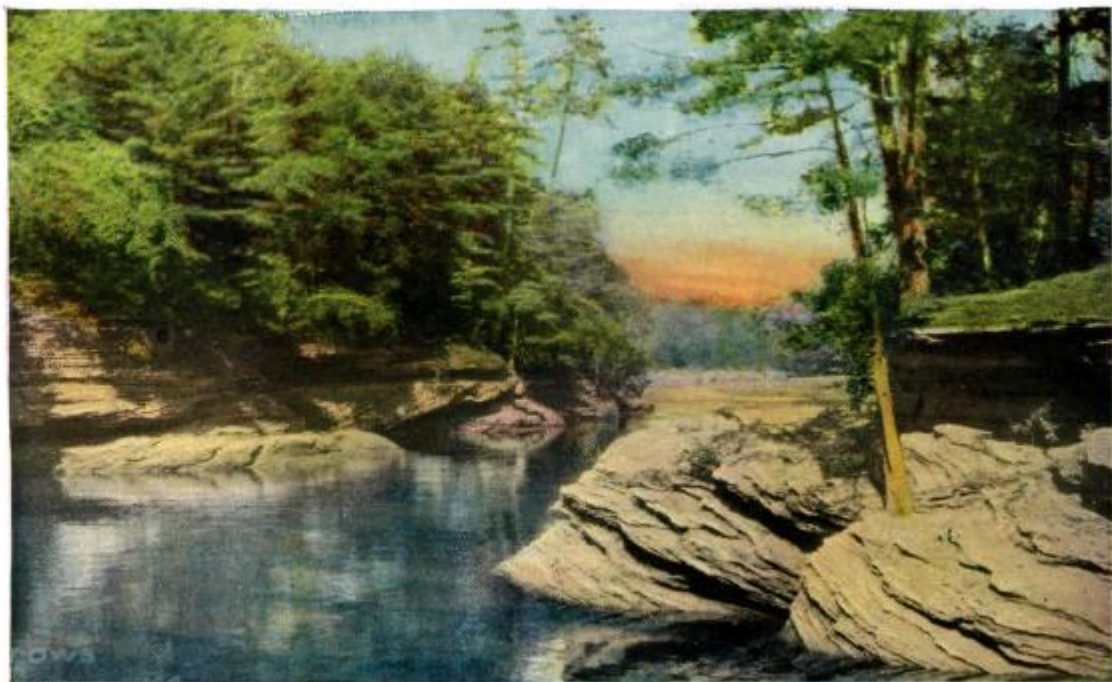
The Navy Yard



when the rafts of timber were brought down the river during the spring freshets.

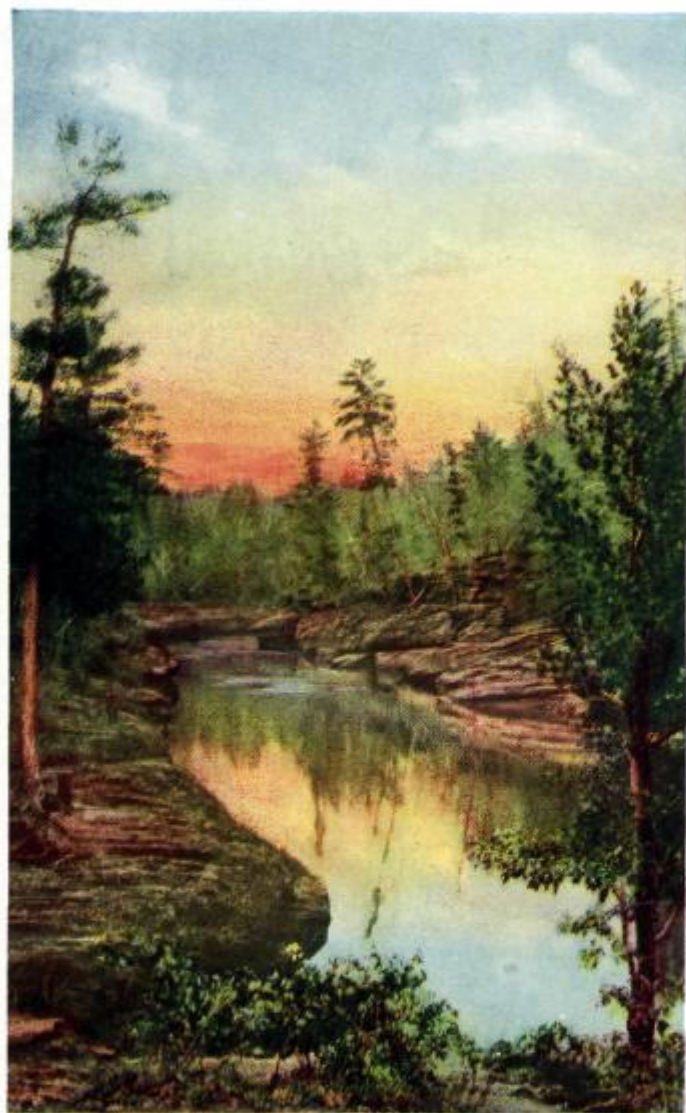
Next above the turn is Black Hawk's Leap, the narrowest part of the river. The first bridge across the Wisconsin was built here in 1848 and washed out by the high water in 1866. There is a legend that Black Hawk leaped across this chasm on his pony when he

The Devil's Elbow



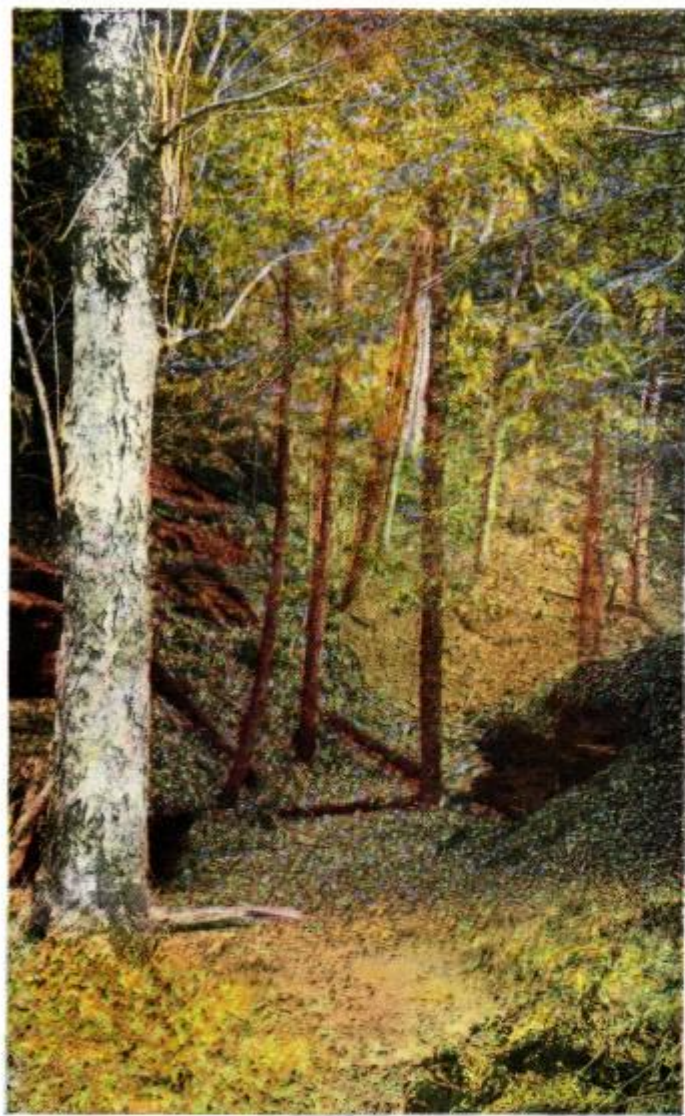
was being pursued after the defeat of the Sac and Fox Indians in 1832. High upon the left hand bank is the cave where the chief is said to have hidden. Rattle Snake Rock is a short, crooked pillar of stone on the same side and not far beyond. Sliding Rocks are on either side of the stream. They slant so as to throw the water into the middle of the channel.

**The Narrows
from
Entrance to
Artist's Glen**



The entrance to Artist's Glen is next above at the right. This is one of the most beautiful ravines of the Dells. As it is wide as well as deep, many fine trees and ferns grow within it.

Not far up the river on the left side, a sand beach marks the upper opening of the Old Channel of the river. Agesago

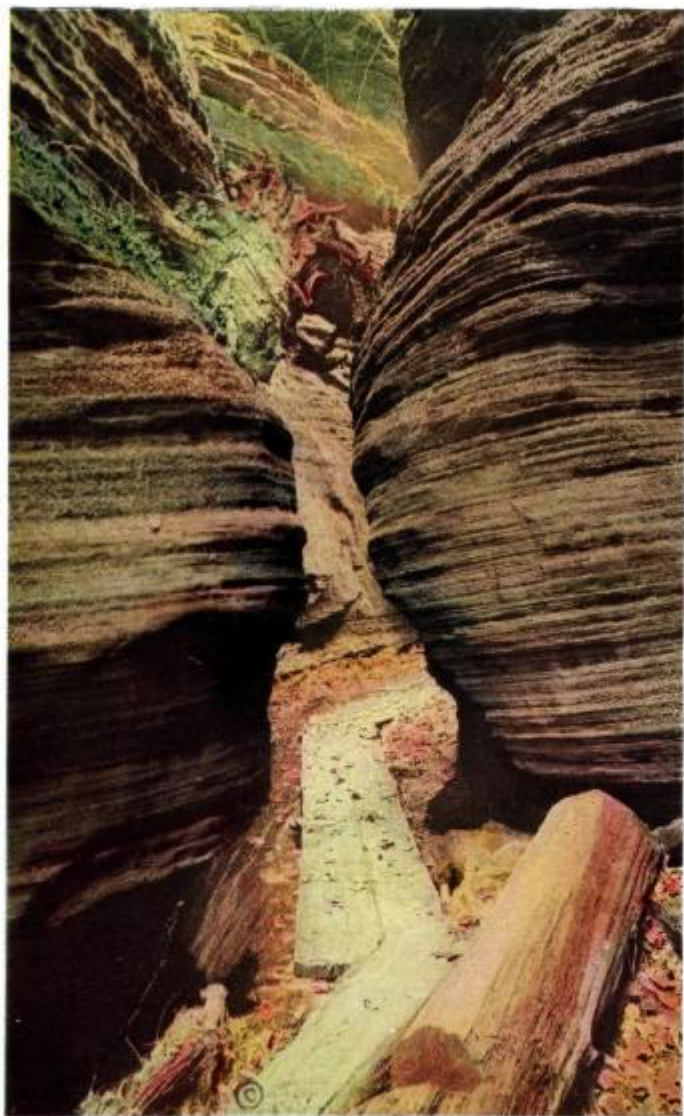


A Glimpse
of the
Artist's Glen



the river flowed through this bed, joining the present stream where the ruins of the Dell House are now seen. An older branch joins the river below the town.

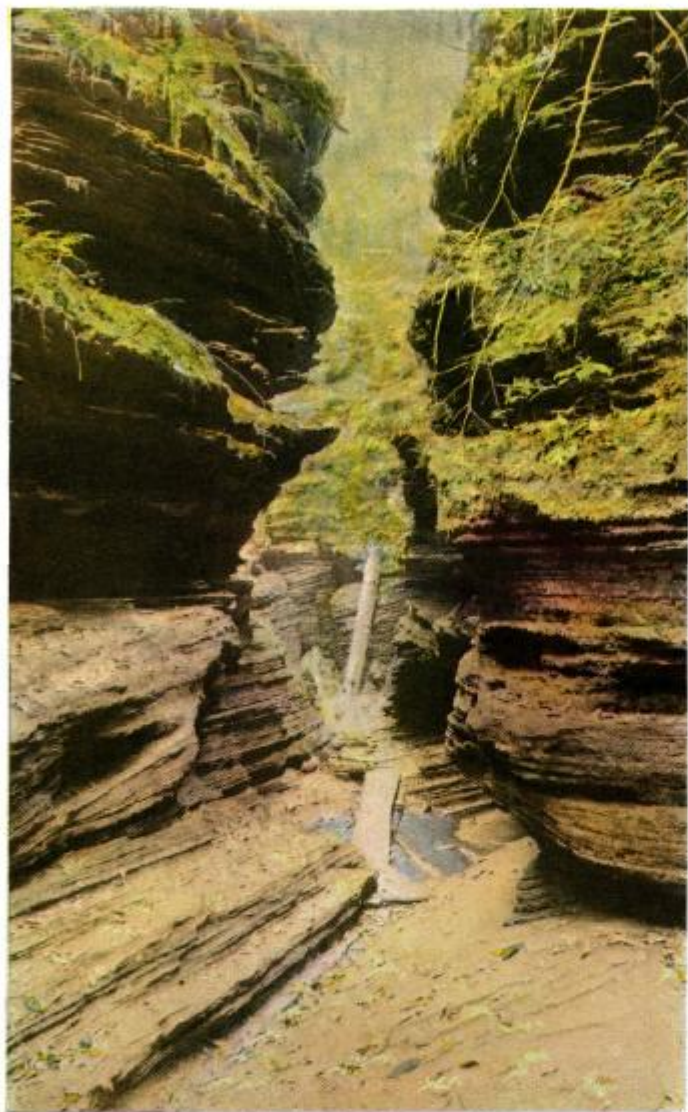
Opposite is the entrance of Cold Water Canyon. Here the boat makes one of its stops, to enable the sight-seers to walk through this beautiful ravine. The water of the



**Fat Man's
Misery in
the Canyon**



river fills the outer end, but farther up it is dry except for a tiny stream fed by springs, and the path descends into the bottom of the glen and winds, for some distance, between narrow and high rock walls. The Devil's Jug is found here. It is but the segment of a jug, cut out of the side of the rock passage by whirling waters as smoothly



A View in
Cold Water
Canyon



as if fashioned by a potter.

Returning to the river and following its upward course, the Alligator's Head with open jaws is next seen on the left bank.

The Clam Banks on the right shore are named from the resemblance of the rocks to a row of overlapping clam shells.



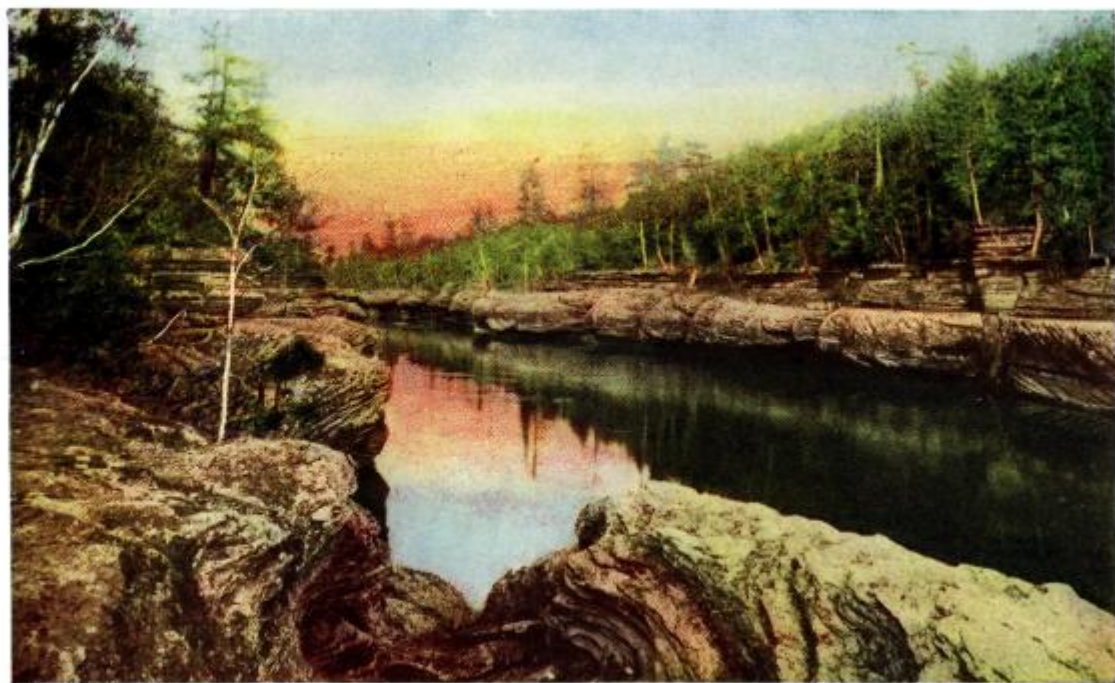


The River
from
Cold Water
Canyon
Entrance



Steamboat Rock is the largest rock island in the Dells and the only one on the upper river. It stands in a semi-circular cove at the right. It is forty or fifty feet high, about one hundred and fifty feet long and a hundred feet wide, and has almost perpendicular sides.

The
Clam Banks



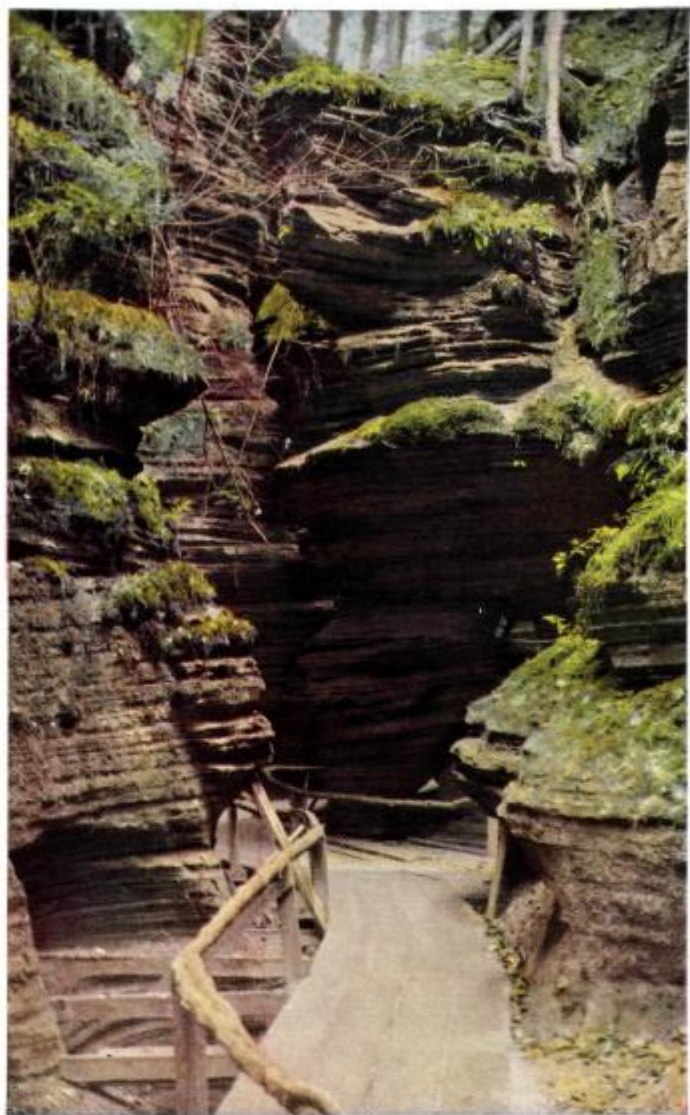
Rood's Glen is not far beyond. It is a narrow and very beautiful passage in the rock, now a backwater of the river, which will admit a small boat. It ends in a pool which is entirely surrounded by rock walls except for the entrance passage.



The Channel
Behind
Steamboat
Rock



The head of the Dells is guarded by tall cliffs called the Upper Jaws. On the right side of the stream these precipitous cliffs are parted by the mouth of Witches Gulch. The river end of the Gulch is broad enough to permit the entrance of boats, from which travelers disembark at a landing place where the gorge suddenly narrows so that it



Path in
Witches
Gulch



is necessary to walk through the rest of it. The Gulch is not so long as the Canyon, but it is much more wild and strange. For part of the distance the walks are high among the shelves and scallops of the rocky walls. For the rest of the way they follow a mere crack in the rock beside a miniature stream, which roars over small rapids. The





Sunset
Point



narrow walls are damp and moss-grown, and many trees interlace high above.

Sunset Point is the down-stream cliff at the mouth of Witches Gulch. From among the wind-twisted pines at its summit may be seen a wide view north and west across the river toward Louis' Bluff and the Palisades at Stand Rock.

The Palisades



Across from the Gulch a group of interesting rock forms is found along the edge of the broken cliff overlooking the river. First to be seen is the high, massive, and beautifully carved rocky cliff or promontory called the Palisades.



Winnebago
Indians at
Demon's Anvil



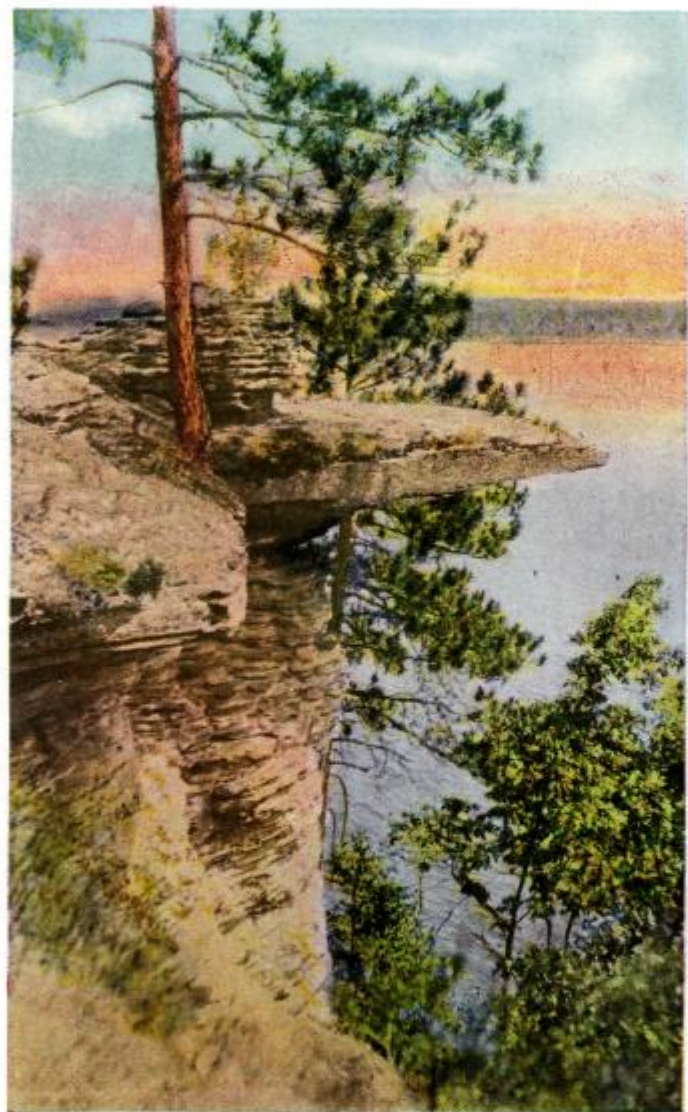
Beyond the Palisades is a glen which forms the natural amphitheater where the Winnebago Indians hold their annual ceremonial dances. This place is said to be an ancient meeting place of the tribe. The amphitheater has seats for about two thousand spectators and its acoustic properties are so good that the most distant of the audience can hear as

A scene in
the Indian
Amphitheater
at Stand Rock



well as see perfectly. Each year in mid-summer many Indians gather here to perform their traditional dances and games. These are spectacular and interesting, and yearly entertain thousands of visitors.

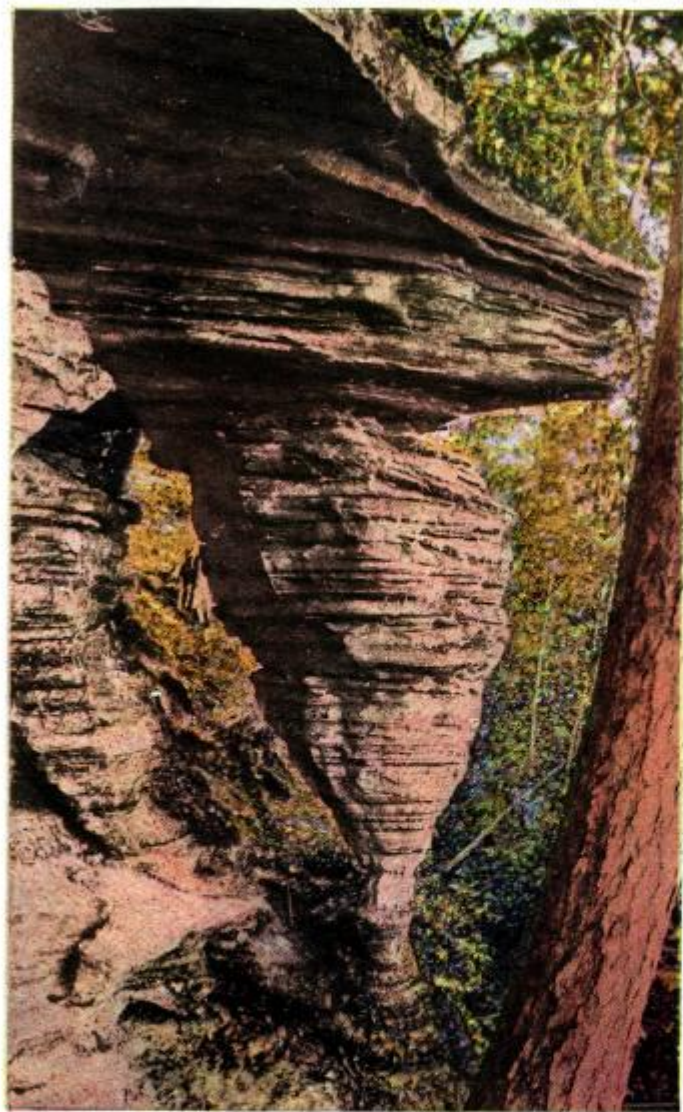
Visor Ledge, high above the river, is a square shelf of rock jutting out like the visor of



Visor Ledge



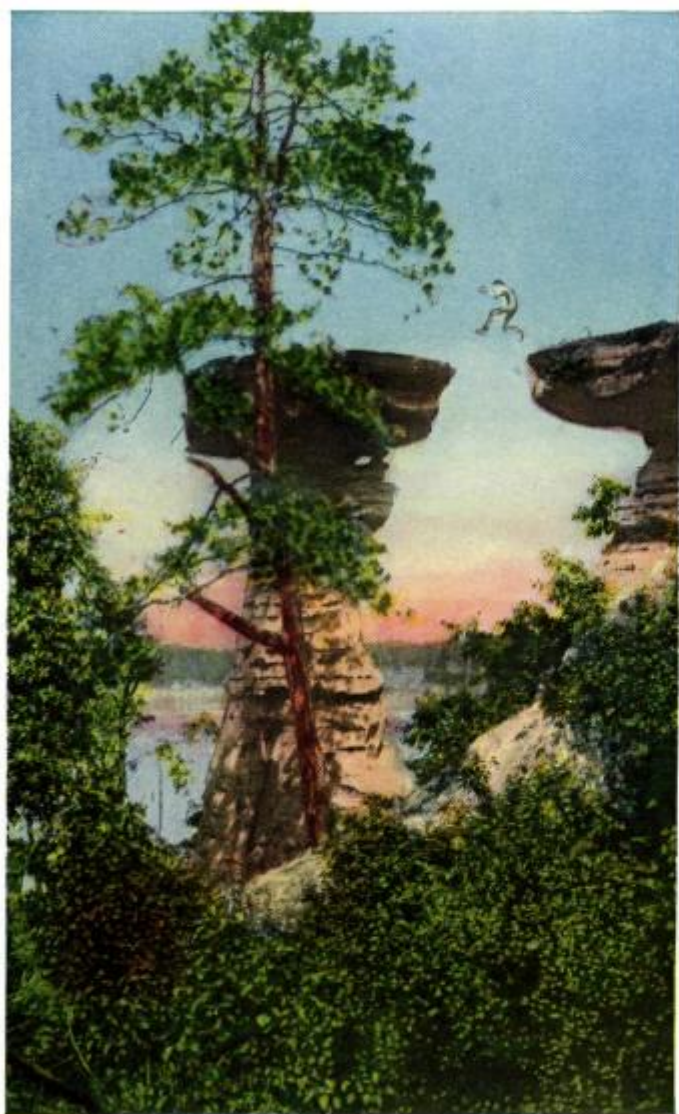
a cap. Next is a shallow cavern called the Fireplace, under one end of another overhanging rock shelf. The other end of this shelf rests upon Hornet's Nest. This is a tapering pillar of rock the same shape as the nests of the paper wasp. Mushroom Rock is a formation similar, but shorter and broader. Luncheon Hall has a rock roof, perfect except



Hornet's
Nest



for a crack a few inches wide and supported by a stout column of rock at the river end. The Demon's Anvil is at the extreme point of the cliff which forms Luncheon Hall. It is a small rock with an opening through the base.



Stand Rock



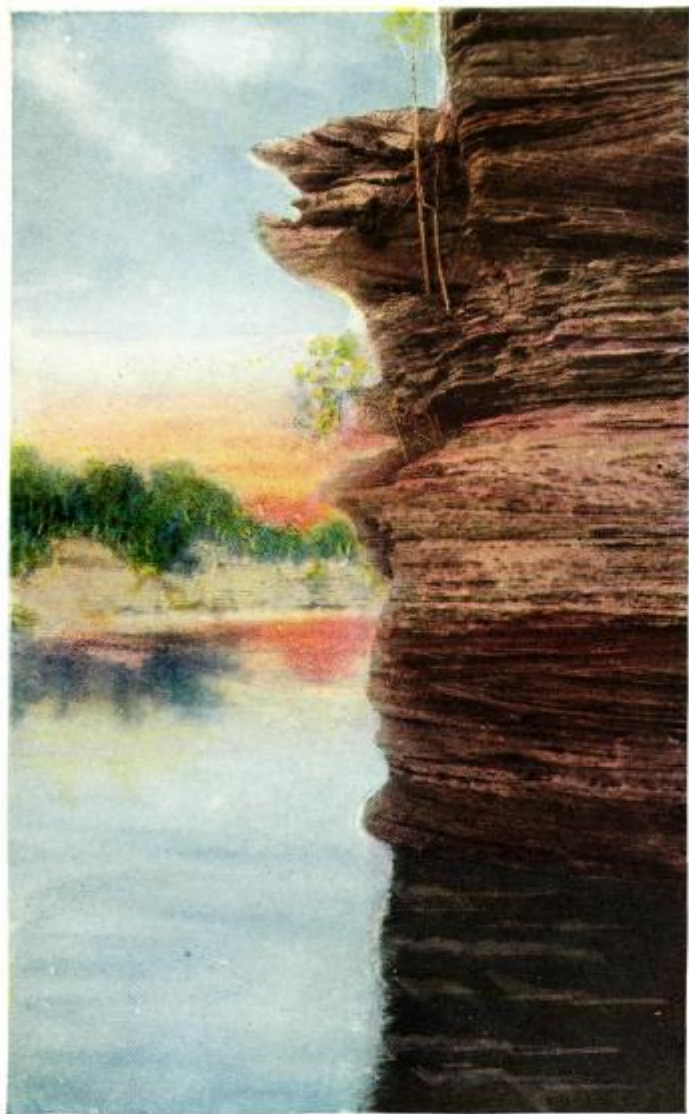
Stand Rock is the most curious and wonderful formation of the Dells region. It is in the form of a huge table, its top on a level with the top of the main cliff and separated from it by a space of five and a half feet. The top is a nearly level slab of sandstone about twenty feet in



A
Winnebago
Brave



diameter and roughly circular in shape. It is supported by a rather irregular pillar of stone forty-six feet high. From the cliff at Stand Rock, Louis' Bluff can be seen up the river. This is an abrupt hill, wooded and crowned with rock.



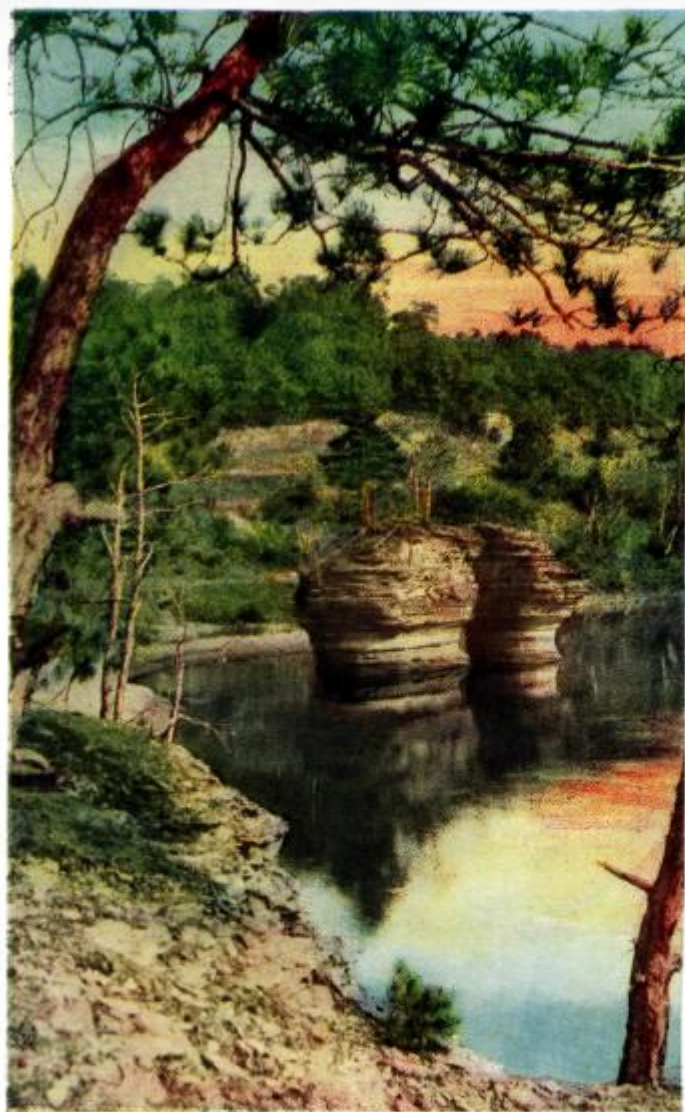
Hawk's Bill



THE LOWER DELLS

The river below the dam is somewhat wider than that above, and the banks are not entirely rockbound. Leaving the landing the Witches Window is seen pierced high in the crags on the right-hand side.





Ink Stand



Opposite and down stream a short distance, is a large boulder called the Devil's Football.

Some distance down the river Hawk's Bill shows against the sky at the crest of a promontory. This spot was also a signal peak on which the Indians lighted their warning fires.

Sugar Bowl is the first of three rock islands in the Lower Dells. It is on the right side of the river, and appears to have been cut off from Grotto Rock, which juts out toward it. This point contains a number of low and winding caverns or grottos. The largest of these is the Cave of the Dark Waters, which the Indians call "Place of Nah-hu-nah (Sturgeon)." Ink Stand, below and near the opposite shore, is a small rock with a cleft part way down. Lone Rock is a long island, the largest of those in the Lower Dells. There are caves in its sides which lead entirely through the rock.

This concludes the list of the chief attractions of the Dells of the Wisconsin. A visitor, noting the exquisite detail of rock and vegetation, will wonder why every foot of the Dells has not its name or legend.

Near the Dells are several beauty spots which are well worth visiting. Southward are Mirror Lake, Lake Delton and Devils Lake State Park. To the north are found the rocky bluffs of Adams and Juneau Counties.

GEOLOGY

The Dells are situated on the extreme eastern margin of the Driftless Area, that unique portion of this state and its three neighbors which was never covered by the glacial ice sheets. These came on the east within about four miles of the river, which was then crowded to the west out of its original channel. The river and the melting of the glacier furnished the water for a great triangular lake. This Glacier Lake Wisconsin had its northeast point near Stevens Point, its northwest point near the Black River, and its narrow southern extremity near Baraboo, covering the whole Dells region. The waters of this great lake eventually escaped by cutting a channel in a sort of sandstone ridge at the southern end of the lake. This channel is the Dells. The margins of this lake now are to be seen as abrupt bluffs rising from the sandy plain. The many isolated rock hills scattered about this plain north and northwest of Kilbourn were once islands. Two of these solitary rocks, Elephant's

Back and Louis' Bluff, are familiar features of the Dells landscape.

It will be noted that the principal ravines tributary to the Dells are on the east bank of the river. This is owing to the fact that they were worn by streams from the nearby melting glacial ice sheet. In the long ages of its labors the river has formed and abandoned two channels that are still plainly to be traced in the heart of the Dells. At first the main flow of water turned west opposite the Cold Water Canyon, making a wide sweep to the southwest through Rocky Arbor Canyon and joining the present river bed through the flat land below town. Later the southern part of this channel became blocked and the stream made a shorter circle entering the present channel at the Old Dell House. Afterward the stream cut a still shorter channel between the Canyon and the site of the Dell House, and the mighty stream flowed henceforth in its present course through the tortuous and beautiful Narrows. Thus it will be seen that the Narrows is geologically the youngest portion of the Dells, which is all a postglacial formation.

INDIANS

When the first French explorers penetrated this region, they encountered a number of Indian tribes making their wandering homes here. These tribes were the Winnebago, Menomonee and Chippewa Indians. Of them all only a few scattered Winnebagoes can now be found in their old hunting grounds. The first meeting of the French with this tribe occurred near the Red Banks on Green Bay. The name, Winnebago, was first translated "Men of the Sea." On this account the explorers, always hoping to find a route through the wilderness to the Pacific Ocean, and thinking that the so-called Men of the Sea might be Chinese, carried with them mandarin robes in which to meet the strangers. Although the Winnebago tribe is not oriental, as the French soon discovered, it is of a different stock from the surrounding Indians. It is, in fact, a branch of the Siouan stock. There is a theory that the tribe wandered into this country

during a westward migration of the Sioux and several related tribes. They have shown a great fidelity to this ground, which they consider their home. They have been driven from reservation to reservation by the desire of the white settler for the land. There have been two forcible removals of portions of the tribe from the lands to which they clung. After these removals, a few always came back to the state. A number of their descendants now own farms in the vicinity of Mauston, not far north of Kilbourn.

The Winnebagoes have not only a picturesque name for the Dells. Neeh-ah-ke-coonah-er-ah, "where the rocks strike together," but several legends concerning the place. There may have been a great many of them which are now lost for the lack of anyone to record them. It is to be expected that the strange and impressive rock forms along the river would suggest to the savages the presence and work of supernatural agencies. They believed that there were two good spirits living in the Dells. One lived in a big hole at the foot of the Narrows. This was a very powerful spirit who looked after the welfare of the tribe. He was supposed to come out once a year, but only when the sun was shining, for lightning would kill him. The other, less powerful spirit, had his home in Lone Rock.

An Indian named Hoonch Hedt-a-gah (Big Bear) told the following stories of the Narrows. To appreciate the first, it must be understood that before the present dam was built at Kilbourn, when the river rose, as it did with the melting of the snow, the water poured through the Narrows in a furious torrent. The passage at this time would be very dangerous even for a large boat. Big Bear's story was, that in old times, if some Indian was accused of a crime and the truth of the accusation could not be determined, he might be placed in a canoe and sent through the Narrows in a season of high water. If he came out alive he was considered innocent. The other accounts for the origin of the Narrows. Big Bear said that when the river used to flow in the old channel the Winnebago Indians were once pursued by their enemies and cornered in

the bend of the older river. Then their god, bigger than the biggest lion, as the lion is bigger than a tiny kitten, tore out the new channel with his teeth and claws, and the river flowed between the Winnebagoes and their pursuers.

The Winnebago Indians took no active part as a tribe in the Black Hawk War of 1832. Some of them fought with the United States troops against the Sacs and Foxes. There is a suspicion that others offered Black Hawk a refuge in their territory in spite of their protests of loyalty to the government. At any rate, after the defeat of Black Hawk's people at the Bad Axe, he and his companion, the Prophet, fled to a retreat on the Wisconsin River. According to several accounts this hiding place was in the Dells, about two miles above Kilbourn. Here he was captured by two Winnebago braves, Chaetar and One-eyed Decorah, who took the captives to the Indian agent at Prairie du Chien. Some of the versions of the capture of Black Hawk locate it much farther up the river. The Dells version, however, has the support of the official report of the Indian Agent Street, and is, therefore, the most credible.

HISTORY

Doubtless the first white man to visit the Dells was some adventurous French wood ranger pursuing his perilous trade in furs with the savages, or one of those dauntless missionary priests, who began to make converts among the tribesmen of the wilderness so early in the French occupation of this country. In fact, the original and more correct name for this beautiful stretch of the river is the Dalles, a word meaning flagstones in correct French, but in the Canadian-French of the voyageurs, "a swift stream of water running between high banks." But the traders and missionaries left no records to show who first saw the Dells, and the official explorers, Marquette and Joliet, followed the Fox-Wisconsin route from Lake Michigan to the Mississippi. The portage between the Fox and Wisconsin rivers is at Portage, a few miles below the

Lower Dells. Navigation between the portage and the Dells is difficult and the explorers presumably had something to do beside sight-seeing.

After about 1820 lumbering took the place of the fur trade in the history of the river. Timber was cut on the upper Wisconsin and its tributaries and sent down the river in the form of great rafts managed by crews of several men. These were the raftsmen, some of the most interesting characters of the time. They have left a colorful and picturesque tradition of themselves to enliven the annals of the community. In 1837-38 the first permanent residence on the river above Portage was erected at the foot of the Narrows on the west side of the river. This was the Dell House, used by the owner, Robert Allen, as a tavern for the accommodation of travellers, more especially the raftsmen.

At the head of the Dells the rafts were divided into sections called "rapids pieces" and sent through the Narrows piecemeal, each section in charge of a full crew. Then each section would tie up in the eddy near the tavern while the crew walked, or, as they called it, "gigged back," to the head of the Dells for another piece. This made the Dell House a convenient point for rest and refreshment after the dangerous passage of the Narrows, where it was not uncommon for the rafts to break on the sharp rocks, spilling the men into the water. The crews, therefore, made the old tavern the scene of many a boisterous celebration.

An interesting incident of rafting in the Dells occurred during the building of Fort Winnebago at the portage in 1830. The timber which was used was cut on the Yellow River and rafted down the Wisconsin by a crew of men under the command of Jefferson Davis, who was then a lieutenant of the garrison of the newly established post.

The last raft came down the river in 1890, and some former rivermen are still living, but their day seems nearly as remote as that of the vikings. The removal of pineries farther north and the

building of railroads caused the disappearance of the unwieldy craft and their wild crews from the Dells.

Kilbourn, recently renamed Wisconsin Dells, owes its location to the fact that the Milwaukee railroad crosses the river at this point, and that it was considered a favorable site for a dam. The railroad was at first expected to cross the river about two miles farther down, where the thriving town of Newport was indulging in a small fury of speculation in anticipation of its arrival. Then the road changed its route and the boom in Newport real estate fell flat, many houses were moved to Kilbourn, others were torn down, and few traces of Newport are to be found except the lilacs which first adorned village door-yards.

Several earlier dams successively occupied the site of the present large concrete structure built by the Southern Wisconsin Power Company. The first dam was torn out in 1859 by the raftsmen who considered that it interfered too much with the passage of the timber. The present dam converts the water power into electricity.

The first steamer to make a trip through the Dells was the "Enterprise," Captain Gilbert. This was in 1850, five years before the first settler at Kilbourn. This boat made two or three subsequent trips, doubtless when the river was at the right stage to permit the passage. It was not until 1873 that the Dells saw its first regular steamer, the "Modocawanda," carrying passengers on daily sight-seeing trips from Kilbourn.

The development of most localities has been given direction and purpose by its pioneers. The pioneer of beauty in the Dells was a photographer, Henry H. Bennett by name, and forty years of his life were spent in trying to capture and imprison the charm of this region in his negatives. He felt and preached that the future of the community lay in its natural beauty. In time the work and enthusiasm of this photographer focused the attention of nature lovers upon the Dells, and gave impetus to its development as a spot of rest and recreation.

